



In the Public Eye

News and Features

Women physicians earn \$63,000 less than male counterparts

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Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health have found a persistent sex bias in physicians' salaries, with women earning on average 14% less than their male counterparts (*Ann Intern Med* 2000;133:104-110).

The study, led by Dr Roberta Ness, focused predominantly on nonacademic physicians and surveyed 232 male and 213 female internists practicing in Pennsylvania. All had been out of medical school for 10 to 30 years, and 85% of the respondents were in their 40s and 50s.

The questionnaires completed by the physicians provided information on demographics; training; board certification; practice type and setting; hours worked per week; division of time between patient care, teaching, research, and administration; and faculty appointment and promotion. In addition, information on marital status, number and ages of children, and leave from work was assessed.

Specialties were divided into high-earning and low-earning categories. High-earning subspecialties included cardiology, hematology/oncology, gastroenterology, and pulmonary/critical care. Low earners encompassed allergy and immunology, geriatrics, infectious disease, endocrinology, rheumatology, nephrology, and general medicine.

Results of the survey showed that women physicians were more likely than men to be in low-paying specialties and to be salaried employees rather than partners or in private practice. In general, female physicians saw fewer patients and did less administrative work but spent as much time as the men teaching, doing paperwork related to patient care, and doing research.

Moreover, women physicians tended to have fewer children than their male counterparts but were more likely to have taken time



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Does Dr Weaver earn less?

off from work or to have worked part time. Among those women who took time off or reduced their working hours, 82% said it was for maternity leave or child care purposes; only 19% of men took time off for these reasons.

Even after adjusting for differences in compensation among various medical specialties and for hours worked per week, the investigators found a salary inequality, with women earning 14% less an hour than male counterparts.

Left unadjusted, the gap is 28% per hour less. On average, men earn \$63,000 a year more than women.

Commenting on the results of the study, Dr Ness said: "Over the past 20 years, women have accounted for an increasing percentage of the US physician workforce, yet they have lagged behind their male colleagues in terms of career success. . . . Our results show that in terms of salary—perhaps the most important marker of gender equity at work—these women are behind men."

Previous research on differences between the sexes in physicians' salaries focused on academics and showed similar findings. Three quarters of the respondents in this survey were nonacademic physicians.